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Discussion: A new tram network for Bristol – a possible scenario?

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Contribution by R. Cottrell

The reader's attention is drawn to a study investigating a potential light rail transit (LRT) network in Bristol. Curiously, the study makes no reference whatsoever to the Advanced Transport for Avon (ATA) project of the 1980s, which steered very close to providing such a system. ATA – of which the reader was chairman, having been the original inspiration – projected a system starting at Portishead, crossing the city centre and terminating at Parkway station. Other extensions were planned.

The company chose to rely on private enterprise funding to lead the project.

ATA received parliamentary powers (by means of a private bill) for the first section – the conversion of the Portishead line to LRT operation (cohabiting with freight traffic to Portbury Docks) to a temporary terminus at Canon's Marsh.

The project collapsed when the two subsequent bills were lost due to opposition by the political opponents of the project.

The 'supertram' to which the authors refer to was in fact sponsored by Avon County Council as the successor to ATA. That fell with the loss of government funding.

Yet spirits still whirl over these affairs. The so-called Metro Bus Project under construction uses more or less the same route that ATA intended through the city centre, as set out in UK parliamentary powers.

Metro Bus may not be viable, since there is no evidence of any significant modal shift from cars to buses.

The reader is convinced that Metro Bus (which is heavily engineered, including displacement of service utilities – for buses?) is a stalking horse for an LRT scheme.

Authors' reply

The authors thank the discussor for his comments on their paper and for drawing their attention to the ATA project. They agree that their paper should have referred to the ATA project in the 1980s and recognise that it was a precursor to the Supertram referred to in their paper. The development of the phased MetroWest attempts to deliver some of the aims of the ATA project, albeit with a heavy rail solution, as reviewed in Pollock-Fraser *et al.* (2016).

The discussor's comment on Metro Bus as being 'a stalking horse for an LRT scheme' is an interesting one. The authors were unaware of the extensive relocation of service utilities for the bus network; LRT may well be revisited depending on the success of the transportation policies in Bristol, Edinburgh and Manchester. Pollock-Fraser *et al.* (2016) have presented a quantitative framework to compare the different transport systems, using Bristol as a test case, but the paper does not intend to present an exhaustive analysis of all transportation systems ever proposed in Bristol.

REFERENCE

- Pollock-Fraser H, Christopher P, Kennedy C *et al.* (2016)
A new tram network for Bristol: a possible solution?
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